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RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0791  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MONROVIA 001393

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2017  
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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: LEGISLATORS KEEN ON LIBERIA HOSTING  
AFRICOM

Classified By: Ambassador Donald E. Booth for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Ambassador briefed Senators and Representatives serving on key legislative committees on the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), and responded to their questions. The legislators expressed overwhelming support for the initiative and reiterated President Sirleaf's request that Liberia be chosen as the site for the new headquarters. They acknowledged, however, that there were many misconceptions about the true purpose of AFRICOM and expressed the need to educate their fellow lawmakers and constituents about the command. They asked for continued Embassy assistance to help counter arguments against AFRICOM, and two legislators who also hold seats in the ECOWAS and Pan-African Parliaments agreed to lobby their African counterparts on behalf of AFRICOM. END SUMMARY.

#### CLARIFYING THE ROLE OF AFRICOM

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12. (U) In separate meetings for Senators and Representatives, the Ambassador, along with chief ODC representative in Monrovia and EmbOffs, briefed the legislators on the history and purpose of AFRICOM, clarifying some of the basics, such as the command's possible footprint, and the interagency structure, assuring the legislators that the military would not "take over USAID", as one Senator put it. Several legislators stressed the need to open a public dialogue on AFRICOM to correct misperceptions. All appreciated the value of interagency coordination on conflict prevention.

#### LOBBYING AT THE PAN-AFRICAN AND ECOWAS PARLIAMENTS

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13. (C) Representative Eugene F. Kparkar of Lofa County, one of Liberia's representatives to the Pan-African Parliament, said that a member of parliament from Botswana had severely criticized AFRICOM at the last Pan-African meeting, calling it an "anti-African Union measure" and "U.S. neo-colonialism." Kparkar said he rebutted in favor of an AFRICOM presence on the continent and will continue to do so, but requested that the U.S. step up advocacy efforts with other African countries so that Liberia was not isolated in its position. Senator Prince Johnson said many ECOWAS Parliament members in a recent meeting argued that the AFRICOM headquarters would be a target for terrorists. Johnson said he countered that AFRICOM's fundamental role is to bring stability to the continent and ultimately help Africa fight global threats itself. The security brought by AFRICOM would help foster development.

#### WAYS FOR LEGISLATORS TO BE MORE INFORMED ON AFRICOM

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14. (C) Representative Richard Saah Gbollie of Margibi County, Chairman of House Committee on National Security, appreciated the Ambassador's efforts to reach out to the legislature on AFRICOM, saying that it cannot be a GOL Executive Branch-to-USG Executive Branch decision. He asserted that the Liberian Senate would ultimately have to approve any agreement for Liberia to host AFRICOM and said the legislature should be included in all the discussions about the command from now on. He suggested that members of the Liberian legislature fly to Washington to meet with the appropriate U.S. House and Senate Committees to discuss AFRICOM. (Note: Ambassador discouraged this blatant request for a free trip to the U.S.) Representative Rufus Gbeior of Grand Gedeh County, Chairman of House Committee on Defense, said legislators would benefit from traveling to Stuttgart, Germany to see the current AFRICOM headquarters. He said that after spending a couple of days there, he and his colleagues would be able to personally vouch for what AFRICOM is and is not and would have a better understanding of its mission.

SENATOR OFFERS TO TABLE RESOLUTION TO HOST AFRICOM  
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15. (C) Senator Johnson said the Liberian Special Security Services had been advising President Sirleaf not to offer to host AFRICOM because of an increased terrorist threat, but that they were the only GOL agency that felt that way. Johnson said he would be willing to introduce a bill in the Senate to support AFRICOM because of the stability it could bring to all of Africa. He and the other Senators present agreed that they would introduce a formal resolution echoing President Sirleaf's offer for Liberia to host AFRICOM when the legislature reopens in January.

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16. (C) COMMENT. The legislators were overall highly supportive of AFRICOM, pledging to do whatever they could to bring the command's headquarters to Liberia. However, both the Senators and Representatives expressed frustration over the Executive Branch, and particularly Defense Minister Brownie Samukai, for not consulting them on a number of military and security sector issues, including AFRICOM. While we cannot get in the middle of this tug-of-war with the two branches, we need to recognize the complicated nature of the relationship of all these actors with checkered and sometimes violent pasts, and do our best to ensure that all parties feel part of the process. Whether or not an AFRICOM presence comes to Liberia, the legislators remain an excellent resource for us in the public relations effort on AFRICOM, both in Liberia and all over the African continent through the Pan-African Parliament and ECOWAS. They are eager and willing to help. It is in our interest to keep them involved. END COMMENT.  
Booth